

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 5406

E.O. 11652 GDS
TAGS PINT, AR
SUBJECT VIOLA TO SUCCEED VIDELA AS ARMY COMMANDER: OTHER
IMPORTANT DECISION STILL PENDING

1. THE ANNOUNCEMENT LAST WEEK OF GENERAL VIDELAS
DECISION THAT GENERAL VIOLA WILL SUCCEED HIM IN THE
JUNTA AS CHIEF OF THE ARMY CONTRIBUTES TO THE SURFACE
IMPRESSION THAT THE PLANS FOR VIDELAS NEW TERM OF
OFFICE AS PRESIDENT (AUGUST 1, 1978 TO MARCH 29, 1981)
ARE ON THE TRACKS AND EVOLVING ACCORDING TO SCHEDULE.
THAT VIOLA HAS BEEN A CLOSE VIDELA ASSOCIATE FOR
OVER 30 YEARS AND IS NEXT IN LINE IN THE ARMY ARE
BEING CITED AS ADDITIONAL SIGNS OF A COHERENT DECISION
ASSURING CONTINUED STABILITY IN THE MILITARY INSTITUTION.
ON OR ABOUT SEPTEMBER 15, ADMIRAL MASSERA IS EXPECTED
TO RESIGN FROM HIS POST AS NAVY COMMANDER IN FAVOR OF
ADMIRAL LAMBRUSCHINI AND AIR FORCE BRIGADIER AGOSTI
WILL BE REPLACED DURING THE FIRST QUARTER OF 1979--
PROBABLY BY BRIGADIER GRAFFIGNA, THE SO CALLED "GRAY
AREAS" THAT NEEDED CLARIFICATION IN TERMS OF THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRESIDENT VIDELA AND THE NEW JUNTA--
LARGELY QUESTION OF PROTOCOL AND PRECEDENT-- HAVE NOW
BEEN RESOLVED EVIDENTLY IN A WAY WHICH IS MUTUALLY
SATISFACTORY TO THE ARMY AND AIR FORCE ON THE ONE HAND
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AND THE NAVY ON THE OTHER.

2. YET, NOT ALL THE BUILDING BRICKS ARE IN PLACE BY A
LONG SHOT AND CONSIDERABLE PROBLEMS LIE AHEAD. THE VIOLA
RESISTANCE FROM THE RINGLEADER OF OPPOSITION TO THE VIDELA-
VIOLA TEAM WITHIN THE ARMY HIGH COMMAND, POWERFUL FIRST
CORPS COMMANDER GENERAL SUAREZ MASON. IT IS WIDELY

BELIEVED THAT SUAREZ MASON WILL BE OUT OF THE PICTURE IN A FEW MONTHS--PERHAPS TO ACCEPT AN AMBASSADORSHIP ABROAD-- BUT THIS IS NOT YET SETTLED. ANOTHER IMPORTANT QUESTION IS WHO WILL REPLACE VIOLA AS ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF. THE FRONT RUNNER APPEARS TO BE THIRD CORPUS COMMANDER GENERAL MENENDEZ, A HARDLINER IN TERMS OF HIS REPRESSION OF TERRORISM BUT ALSO A MAN REPUTED TO HAVE SUPPORTED VIDELA WHEN THE CHIPS WERE DOWN. (VIOLA WOULD PREFER II CORPUS COMMANDER GLATIERI TO REPLACE HIM AS CHIEF OF STAFF.) THIS DECISION IS NOT EXPECTED UNTIL LATER IN THE YEAR AT THE TIME WHEN THE REGULAR CHANGES OF ASSIGNMENT ARE TRADITIONALLY MADE IN THE ARMY. IN THE INTERIM, GENERAL MONTES WILL PROBABLY SERVE AS ACTING CHIEF OF STAFF.

3. WITH REGARD TO POSSIBLE CHANGES IN VIDELA'S CABINET, A PRESIDENTIAL AIDE TELLS US THAT VIDELA'S NEXT CABINET WILL BE HALF-MILITARY AND HALF-CIVILIAN. (THIS SOURCE AND OTHERS BELIEVE THAT ECONOMY MINISTER MARTINEZ DE HOZ WILL SURVIVE THE EXPECTED CABINET CRISIS, DESPITE PRESSURE TO HAVE HIM REPLACED.) THERE HAVE BEEN NEWS REPORTS THAT VIDELA WILL WANT HIS NEW MILITARY CABINET APPOINTEES TO BE RETIRED OFFICERS IN ORDER TO GUARANTEE HIS AUTHORITY OVER THEM. (OUR UNDERSTANDING IS THAT VIDELA'S MILITARY APPOINTMENTS TO HIS NEXT CABINET WILL REQUIRE THE PRIOR CONSENT OF THE JUNTA, WHEREAS THE CIVILIAN APPOINTMENTS WILL NOT). OUR CASA ROSADA SOURCE
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DOES NOT BELIEVE THERE WILL BE ANY CABINET CHANGES UNTIL LATER ON THE YEAR I.E., THEY ALSO BE CO-ORDINATED WITH THE YEAR END CHANGES IN MILITARY ASSIGNMENT-- WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF THE WEAKEST LINK IN THE CURRENT CABINET, EDUCATION MINISTER CATALAN. (WHEN THE CHANGE DOES COME, ADMIRAL MONTES ALMOST CERTAINLY WILL BE RELIEVED OF HIS FOREIGN MINISTRY POSITION. WE GATHER THAT AT LEAST SOME ADVISORS IN THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE ARE PRESSING FOR A CIVILIAN FOREIGN MINISTER.)

4. THE POLITICAL TEMPO UNDOUBTEDLY WILL PICK UP DURING VIDELA'S SECOND TERM. WHILE THE ARMED FORCES ARE STILL IN THE EARLY STAGES OF DISCUSSING THE CONSTITUTIONAL POLITICAL MODEL THEY EVENTUALLY HOPE TO CREATE AND HOW THEY PROPOSE TO GET THERE, VIDELA AND THE ARMY HIGH COMMAND MAY HAVE TO MOVE MORE RAPIDLY TOWARD RESTORING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS THAN EARLIER ANTICIPATED. THE PRINCIPAL FACTOR IN ACCELERATING THE PROCESS IS THE EXPECTATION THAT ADMIRAL MASSERA WILL INITIATE A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN SHORTLY AFTER LEAVING OFFICE IN SEPTEMBER. (OF COURSE, THE CAMPAIGN REALLY BEGAN MONTHS AGO.) BUT MASSERA IS NOT THE ONLY POLITICAL CAUDILLO WAITING IN THE WINGS,

RIGHT WING ARMY GENERAL (RET) ACDEL VILAS RECENTLY MADE HIS DEBUT BY PARTICIPATING IN A POLITICALLY SIGNIFICANT CHURCH MASS FOR THE LATE JUNA PERON, WHICH WAS FOLLOWED BY A BRIEF DEMONSTRATION IN PLAZA DE MAYO BEFORE BEING BROKEN UP BY POLICE (BUENOS AIRES 5218). BOTH MASSERA AND VILAS APPEAR TO POTENTIAL COMPETITORS FOR THE PERONIST/LABOR VOTE. FORMER PRESIDENT LANUSSE IS ANOTHER EX-MILITARY FIGURE BELIEVED TO HAVE POLITICAL AMBITIONS. AS OUR PRESIDENTIAL PALACE SOURCE SAID RECENTLY, VIDELA MAY BE FORCED TO MOVE AHEAD WITH HIS OWN POLITICAL PLANS MUCH MORE RAPIDLY NOW IN THE FACE OF THIS POTENTIAL COMPETITIONA.

5. KEY TO VIDELA'S SUCCESS WILL BE THE CONTINUED SUPPORT
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OF VIOLA AND VIOLA'S CONTINUED ABILITY TO CONTROL THE ARMY. WHILE VIDELA AND VIOLA ARE SAID TO BE AN INSEPARABLE DUO, THE DYNAMICS OF A SITUATION IN WHICH CONTRARY PRESSURES ARE IMPOSED ON THE VIDELA-VIOLA TEAM (EG, POLITICAL PRESSURES ON THE PRESIDENCY FROM THE US FOR RESOLUTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEM AND THE ISSUE OF POLITICAL DEMOCRACY ON THE ONE HAND AND RESISTANCE WITHIN THE ARMY TO THESE REFORMS ON THE OTHER) COULD LOOSEN THE STRONG TIES IN A PROCESS OF ATTRITION. VIOLA'S LOYALTY TO VIDELA IS TAKEN FOR GRANTED AT PRESENT, BUT ONE DOES NOT HAVE TO LOOK FAR BACK IN HISTORY FOR EXAMPLES OF STRONG MILITARY COMMANDERS WITH POLITICAL AMBITIONS OF THEIR OWN WHO HAVE FORCED OUR THEIR CLOSE MILITARY COLLEAGUES FROM THE PRESIDENCY (DG, LANUSSE IN 1971). POLITICAL LIFE AT LEAST WILL BE MORE INTERESTING FROM HERE ON IN.
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